

July 26, 2016

Greetings Robert Cole

When I returned to university in my mid-fifties to major in history, it was on the back of forty years of exploring a wide range of prose and literature, fables and myths, along with the biographies of many great writers. In spite of the years spent studying history, I never understood why creative expression was given such little academic credence, as a form and type of primary document. I remain puzzled by this.

The small volume of stories I am forwarding is a prime example of creative writing that succinctly depicts a time, a place and something of the mentalité at play in a frontier cultural environment. In this case, Alberta.

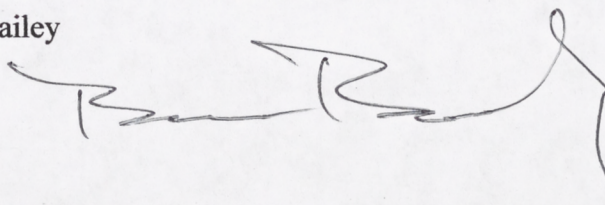
Though I could be wrong, my impression of this author is based on the idea that he is potentially an important Canadian writer and almost certainly an important frontier writer.

As a donation, if you could lodge this material in the Peel Library that would be great. If it is a problem, find a friend that might enjoy this author's tales and pass it on.

I am only printing and binding 25 copies of this collection, some are for a few friends, frontier professors and to donate where I can. As such, this effort is one of planting a very few seeds, which is basically all I can really do.

Best regards,

Bruce Bailey

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Bruce Bailey', with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke and a vertical line extending upwards from the right end.

THE SHORT STORIES
And
ESSAYS
OF
"KISMET"

b.1853-1887

Transcribed and edited
by
B. Gregory Bailey



THE SHORT STORIES AND ESSAYS

of

“KISMET”

***Published in the Calgary Tribune between
February and July 1886***

***Transcribed and edited by
B. Gregory Bailey***

Published by B. Gregory Bailey

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Jacket design BGB

ISBN 978-0-9940540

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Obituary Notice

The Calgary Tribune June 17, 1887 pg. 10

John Little Dead

“After life a fev’rish dream. He sleeps well”

HIS LIFE

The deceased was born in the county of Wellington, Ontario. In the spring of 1876 he came to the Northwest and was engaged as telegraph operator at Battleford for Fuller & Co, on the Northern line, which was being built from Fort Pelly to Edmonton. In about a week after his arrival he was appointed superintendent of the whole line, which position he held for five years till the road was handed over to the government. While at Battleford he wrote a number of articles for the London Free Press, reflecting severely on the officials of the Northwest at the time. In the spring of '81, in company with Geo. C. Hamilton, he left Battleford, travelling between the Battle and Saskatchewan river, till they reached the Edmonton Trail, looking for a suitable location for a stock ranche. They then went south to Macleod, where he passed the winter of '81 and in the spring of '82 he

started for Deer Lodge Montana, where he purchased a band of horses, which he took to the Red Deer Country. That winter was a hard one, and mange and disease broke out in his band, killing a number of them and greatly crippling him financially. In the summer of 1883 he came to Calgary and accepted a position as operator on the line of the C.P.R., which he resigned the following spring. He then sold the remnant of his band of horses to T. O. Critchley and again sought employment with the construction company of the C.P.R. as pioneer operator, through the mountains. In this position he remained till the road was completed in the fall of '85. He then purchased a small band of cattle, which he ranged on the elbow river, near Calgary, but when spring approached he again accepted a position as the C.P.R. operator at Langdon, where he remained till sickness compelled to relinquish the job.

During the period of his illness here, deceased received every attention which the strongest kind of personal friendship could suggest. Mr. J. G. Martin was almost constantly in attendance in the sick room, and nothing could have been done by which was not at least sought to be done. Mr. Nelson Hoad acted as nurse, and was faithful and unremitting in the performance of his duties.

At 1:30 on Wednesday morning, kindly death came to relieve him from his long struggle, and John Little was no more. Since then hundreds of lips in Calgary have said, "Poor Jack." None who knew him personally but experienced a

melancholy sorrow at the news of this death, and many whose only acquaintance with him was through his writings, will feel a personal grief, will recognize that a great heart has ceased to beat, and mourn that the pen of "Kismet" has been stilled forever. The last words he wrote for the public were these:

"And perchance when the gloom of the grave

shall fade,

And the portals of sorrow are passed,

I shall clasp her, and kiss her, and shout with

Joy,

My darling: I'm home at last."

And so, dear old Jack has at last gone home. To us, who knew him so well, his loss is like one of the household. There will never again be another "Kismet". The termination of a life so strangely restless, the blotting out of a mind so singularly gifted, leaves no hope that it will ever be patterned. It suggests that trend of thought, which so often found weird and beautiful expression in the poems of the man himself:

"Out through the unknown future,

Lieth a silent shore,

Where the tide of a fathomless ocean

Sings with a sullen roar.

We can hear as we journey onward

With weary and faltering tread

The tide of eternity breaking

On the echoless shores of the dead”

Jack himself has now “passed the melancholy flood of which the poet speaks.” For months past deceased has been in anything but good health. His system generally seemed to be giving way. About a month ago he was brought here from Langdon for medical treatment, but his illness, which had developed softening of the brain had already progressed so far that from that time till the moment of this death, he can scarcely be said ever to have been conscious of what was proceeding about him.¹ His aged father was telegraphed for and came up from Ontario, but his son was unable to recognize him. The end was peaceful.

¹ Brain softening, or Encephalomalacia is an incurable disease, which is brought on by a stroke, a head injury or infection.

The Calgary Tribune, Oct. 29, 1886 pg. 1

“A Put-Up Job”

The case against Mr. Little, the telegraph operator at Langdon, which was investigated at the Barracks last Saturday, turned out to be nothing more than a trumped up charge, which Supt. Antrobus dismissed immediately (sic) the evidence was given. Mr. Little's crime consisted in drawing upon his assailant a gleaming mouth organ, with which dangerous weapon he is known to be an expert.

A Forward

“Kismet” is a word that appeared in the English language in the late 1800s. It is based on a number of Arabic dialects, and means ‘fate’ or ‘destiny’.

While researching in the historical newspapers of Alberta, which are found online at the *Our Future, Our Past* website, I came across the stories, creative essays and poems Kismet published between February 1886 to May 1887.

In transcribing his writings, I have taken the liberty to impose some paragraph structure. A handful of obscure terms have been footnoted and brief comments are added in a few places. About 30 words are unreadable in the online text. In this setting they are set out in brackets with underlining to indicate the number of missing words.

This selection of John Little’s creative writing follows the dates of publication, and includes six short stories and three creative essays. His poems are not included because they deal exclusively with his approaching death, and begin to appear in the Calgary Tribune after the third story *My experience with Dogs* is published. Then he begins to obliquely reference his approaching demise in the short stories.

The two stanzas that editor Thomas Braden quoted in his obituary are possibly the strongest passages in Kismet’s series of death poems.

John Little was primarily an itinerant telegraph operator, yet in the settings of his prose he presents himself as a hard pressed, small-scale rancher, rounder and outlaw (occasionally). Historically, he represents and portrays the young single male drifting through a vast region dotted with small pockets of human population. He and his 'Pards', as he calls them, are portrayed as under-employed rounders and vagrants. They occasionally help him engage in grand but farcical adventures, which require bravery, resolve and genius — of which Kismet is in no short supply.

By exploring the database of local histories, which is also found at the *Our Future Our Past* website, in an effort to determine if the characters in his stories were real or fictional, it was possible to find references to some of these individuals, who were in fact his contemporaries and some were undoubtedly his friends.

However, the events he describes are primarily flights of a fertile imagination. For example, in the tale, "My Experience with Dogs", one Dr. Henderson is mentioned. A land ownership map of the period shows that Dr. Henderson did have a quarter section in the Langdon area, but John Little is not declared as a landowner, though Kismet infers that he does have a homestead in the region.

It was unlikely he had much time to develop a ranch, since his employment would have required most of his attention. The job of railway telegrapher involved maintaining contact with a central operator in order to keep the trains on time, and to operate switches to avoid train collisions. This employment, though, would have allowed Kismet ample time play his harp,

and write stories and essays.

Some of his material appears to have been written at an earlier date, other pieces read as though they were composed nearer to the present.

One of the striking features of John Little's literary journalism is found in his impulse and ability to create an aura of mythology in his fictional persona and the characters around him. He succeeds in this by often pointing out that his adventures require determination, courage and greatness.

Perhaps the most interesting feature of his prose is seen in his creative use of many of the narrative elements that appear in postmodern literature — nearly a century before it became a functional component of modern English language prose.

His imaginative weaving of frontier perspectives, images and events often unfold as a collage of fragmentation. He also employs metafiction and symbolic representations. At times, different meanings in the same text appear in layers and can oppose one another. He underscores these features with the use of real and fictionalized events, previous literary ideas, but expressed in the vernacular of the time, and blends and holds his yarns together with historical, biblical, geographic, cosmic and poetic references. Occasionally, his night and his daydreams can appear in a story.

In addition, *Kismet* employs the narrative device of the 'unreliable narrator'. This is done by casting himself as an idiot, fool and liar, who is happily creating impossible plots and story lines that are often driven by humor and irony.

And he is dying young — and he knows it.

As a writer from Canada's western frontier period, Kismet provides an interpretation of an earlier time that is unique, creative and authentic. One can only guess where he might have taken his skills, had he lived beyond thirty-four years of age.

CHANGES

(Written for the Tribune by Kismet)

— Feb. 13, 1886 page 4 —

In the melancholy solitude of my country residence, with no companionship save that of an aged cat with a frozen ear, and no sound to break the awful solitude but the blood chilling yell of a kit fox on a neighboring hill, a man naturally feels like cursing the senseless idiot who whined for a "lodge in some vast wilderness."

Tonight the kit foxes and the owls appear to be holding a sort of requiem mass, to such a fearful extent that in order to dispel the gloom, in a measure, I have the hardihood to put myself in communication with you. True, there is a marked difference between an editor and a nameless scribe, but as there is a hazy possibility that we may someday shine together as stars in glory, when the present has merged into the eternal, we venture to place ourselves on a level with you now; and as you are liable to go busted sometime [____] to reach our present level, we will go right ahead.

My dear sir, has it never struck you that the customs, the times and the people are changing rapidly? No, I suppose not. There is such a whirlpool of seething venom bolting around your rancorous little town that you have not time to give it a thought. Therefore I will think for you and charge you four bits, which I

would like you to send as soon as possible.²

Yes, the times have changed, and changed sadly. Years ago, when the country was in its infancy, comparatively unknown, when the buffalo roamed in thousands and a man could poison wolves without giving the Lieu't Gov'n fifty cents, the land was in the glory and the boys in the zenith of their prosperity. In those abundant days of pemmican, husky dogs and duffle socks, Butlin [___], Bill Smith, Jim Owan, Hamilton, myself and the rest of that old-time band were in the very flood tide and moon tide of our success.³ We had amassed a competence honorably, and by rustling. We looked exultingly over the flowering wilderness unmarred by the furrow of the plow, untrammelled by colonization or stock leases, monarchs of all we surveyed.

But times have changed! Where is that old-time throng? Some have been mustered into the pale ranks of the dead, and marched silently away into that undiscovered country, and if the pathetic remnant are in anything like my fix, they are cranky and bald headed and absolutely without a "splitter".

With the advent of the railway, came the first serious and emphatic change. The land was overrun by adventurers and fortune hunters of different nationalities and grades, by dudes, by hoodlums, by gamblers and by the noxious swarm of social

² John Little and Thomas Braden, editor of the Calgary Tribune, knew each other, and Braden had probably asked for a contribution, in the knowledge that Little had previously published material in the London Free Press.

³ Local histories suggest Joseph Butlin was a former Mountie, and George Hamilton, also mentioned in the obituary, was a ferry operator.

parasites, which ever follows the march of civilization. The young men with white shirts, the store clothes, the perfume, the frankincense and the myrrh and the ghastly smirk came, men of the class who had not the sand to face the hardship of a frontier life, until they could come on "flowery beds of ease," and with them came the civilized white women and their lovely daughters arrayed in gorgeous apparel fit to knock the tar off of "Solomon in all his glory."

And where were we? We took a back seat. The star of our glory was passing away; the frontier men with the greasy breeches and long fingernails was looked upon with disdainful and yet timid wonder, by those high-bred dudes and damsels, and for all time afterwards shunned religiously as men unclean and dangerous and as beings socially excommunicated and damned. Did I say we all retired? No not all. Some, in a fit of desperation, rushed into the high toned ranks, bought them store bought cloths and white shirts, anointed themselves, and by dint of their old time tenacity won for themselves positions, and one actually rose to the dazzling height of alderman. But his luck was too great and unearthly to last. Where is he now? Poor old cuss! I can't help but laugh when I think of his awful luck, for I know how it is, for I have been there twice myself.

But the best of us retired permanently, and patiently watch the gradual dismemberment and despoliation of a country, the magnificent inheritance of Canada's sons, watch sullenly the gradual encroachment of that rigorous and surf-like bondage, and sad humiliation of a brave and loyal people, reviled and spat upon by arrogant and ignorant political hirelings, who,

Haman like, sit within the gate.⁴

But the times have changed. My dear old soc, I find it would take too long to tell how and why, but I will give you an instance to illustrate it.

There is a contrivance in your town they call a roller rink. Let me tell you about it. I had never seen any of these little wagons, but had read about them. Some time ago I visited Calgary and got drunk. There is nothing like owning up like a man. Yes, I had been drunk two or three weeks, and had got pretty hazy and close on to a financial wreck; thought a boot jack had ears and walked sideways and had an idea a spittoon in Grand Central was a snapping turtle with about 400 pairs of wings and a bill on it like a Jew's harp.

However, one night, while in this hazy and uncertain condition, I walked out in front of the Grand Central to observe the starry heavens. I observed them and remarked also, that there were more meteors and comets than I ever remembered having seen before. There were also four or five moons too many. While I gazed at this curious spectacle I became conscious of a strange unearthly sound. Nothing that I had ever heard before resembled it. It sounded like the moan of the sea (not that I ever heard the moan of the sea, but I guess that's the way it sounds.) Then it sounded like a house on fire, like a railway smash up and like most every ungodly sound on earth. I looked around on every hand and got rattled. Then a great solemnity fell upon me and I said to myself, this is either the morning of the

⁴ Old Testament reference to a political figure in the Persian Empire.

resurrection, or I've got the "Jim Jams."

I looked around for the fire which I knew would accompany the resurrection, but there was no fire — only the stars bunting against one another and the half dozen moons playing cricket, and I rushed around the corner. The sound increased in fury, and finally I located it in a building, which leaped up in the moonlight like a poor house on Christmas, and I entered in a state of curious dread.

It was a dreadful spectacle. Men, women, children, dudes, policemen and all sorts and conditions of man, in one hot, furious throng gone stark staring mad. It was an awful sight, all going one way, and going with dreadful haste. Now and then one would fall down and the rest would ride over him, with howls and mad laughter like a chorus of lost spirits. The sweat stood on me like beads, I did not understand it; my knees smote one against another. The din, the clangor, the demonic laughter, the mad rush to and fro, were too much for me. My hair rose as one man. I whispered to myself this is hell, and fled in horror from the accursed spot.

I went to bed and covered up in the clothes, but the wagons and the mad howling throng were before me and I had to get 12 or 13 drinks before I could be soothed. Next morning I heard it was a skating rink. I have never been back since. I never want to.

I have got to chop the night's wood now and boil a mess of beans, but will look you up some other time

My Experience as a Confidence Man

— March 13, 1886 page 4 —

This beautiful weather, with its harbingers of spring has an effect, more or less, on the sons of men, and of women also, but it has a startling effect on me, and I feel glad because I have reason now to believe I have grub enough to pull through to spring. I was very suspicious of the fine weather for some time, but as the month wore away, I could not keep from going out every day, put my hands in my pocket, strut around, and take a look at the blue heavens. If I saw a bird fly by, I would say to my pard, "that's a robin, I guess, and spring can't be much further away than Sheep Creek. I guess we can hold her down." If I saw a poor cow pass, I would call out to my pard and say, "that poor cuss is out of luck; she will throw up her tail soon, but you bet we're going to get there." But I said this to cheer my pard, for he had chilblains and was down on his back. If I could only have seen a hawk, I would have had the dead clinch on spring, but one day I saw a muskrat at the water-hole and I ran and told my pard that the "voice of the muskrat was heard abroad throughout the land" and forthwith we began to speculate on what we would do with our 8 dollars, which we expected to have left over.

He wanted us to invest in a band of sheep, but being older and more prudent, I told him life was uncertain and spring might hang around Sheep Creek for a month. The winter months are

always hard on the deserving poor, and this winter had been no exception for me and my pard.

We boarded at the Grand Central last fall, until times began to get rocky, socially and financially. In the financial line first. The boss would tap me off and say: "Lemme see, Oh, ah, yes, you had 12 meals last week and 10 this week so far, how would it be if we square up and take a fresh hold of each other. And I said to him, the first time, that I did not mind taking a fresh and abiding hold on him, but as to squaring up, why, ah, well, in fact, "I was rather cramped," but would fix it right away you bet, "after the clouds rolled by darling."

Socially, because it was rumored that the judge had finally decided that as the town was in a mixed condition he didn't know how he could better utilize men of genius, and rare attainments, than by having them saw wood for the police. He said he was down on men of genius and rare attainments, anyway, because in a judicial capacity he had observed that these men of brilliant intellects would steal like sin personified and most of them would strike a man "for a half to eat on."⁵

So one day I ran across my pard whittling a stick on a lumber pile and he said, "How about these men of genius, do we come under that head anyway?" and he looked careworn and anxious. Then said I, "Pardner, full many a flower is born to blush unseen, but anyway we come under the head of the class that strike men for a 'half' so we'll go off and dwell amid the company of nature; and will take up a ranch, we will hear the bleat of our

⁵ This would probably refer to the first half of a loan, the borrowing half. The repayment half may have been another matter.

gentle sheep, the [____] will amble around our wigwams, and the prairie chicken will chuckle in the brush and we will be happy, and by and by we may sell the ranch and surrounding landscape to some Englishman for 20,000 dollars."

"All right," he said, "you get the grub. Give some of these chaps a game of confidence. I'll go with you and help you out." So we started off. I didn't go to a store where I was known, but betook us to the store of a stranger, and I boldly entered, and in a free and rollicking way, said to the boss: "How are tricks, anyway, old man — wheel of business sloshing around and things a boomin like blazes I guess." He didn't catch much of my cheerfulness, but solemnly said, "Guess it hain't sloshed much. What de'ye want."

"Well," said I, assuming a serious business air, "what's flour worth, say by the wagon load? Say by 2 or 3 wagonloads?"

"Why," said he, all briskness and animations, "why if taken in bulk like that I can make it at \$2.75."

"Yes," said I slowly, in a contemplative way, "but what's the lowest for the cheapest Indian flour, say the one X kind?"

"Oh, you're a trader, I see," said he, and he bustled around and wrung his hands with deep joy. "Why, I can put you in a car of that at [\$ ____]."

"Well," said I [____], "I guess that's the kind I'll take. Now about tea; how's your tea?"

"Oh dirt cheap; put it in by the chest from 23c to [\$ ____]."

"The 23c will be my caliber to a dot," said I. "Now about the sow belly."

"I have got boss bacon at \$13.50," said he, "but I have some

if taken in quantities to trade to Indians or poor white men, I can put in at 7c per,” said he, warming to future prospects, “it’s about the goldarndest stuff on earth.”

I felt weak, but said bravely, “The 7c is my huckleberry. Now baking powder.”

“Ah,” said he, “I’ve got you there. I have a lot of damaged ‘one spoon’ regular out [____] just the stuff for the red boys. bet yer life that’ll shrivel ‘em up inside like a roasted bug: give you that by [____] a can, yes b’gosh, for 15c,” and he sparkled and looked as happy as a man at a dog fight.

I felt even more sorrowful, but said firmly, “Pardner, the 15c goes; that’s all I want.”

“Well,” said he, sitting down and briskly taking a pen from behind his ear. “Let’s see, flour, tea, bacon, baking powder. How many thousand pounds of flour and bacon will you take, and what quantity of tea and powder?”

“Well,” said I, slowly, as I meditatively felt my chin with my thumb and finger. “I guess I’ll take a sack of the 1X, 5 or 6 pounds of the bacon, half a pound of the 23c, and a can of baking power.”

A look of stony amazement, the color of ashes of Dead Sea fruit, began to spread over his countenance, and I hastened to say, “You see me and my pardner there,” jerking my thumb over my shoulder to where my pardner was working the toe of his boot in the mud outside, pretending he was listening to nothing, “me and my pardner are going trading, and we thought we would price things and sample them out at our ranch and come in next week and buy enough to load our train and pay for the whole

outfit, and as we have a good thing ahead we may buy out your whole outfit by spring, and we ain't the fellows to kick at prices. You bet, we'll do the slick thing with you old man," and I gave him a shrewd business wink.

"You bet you will," said he, "just wait a minute till I consult my pardner," and he slipped into a back room. I looked around at my own pardner with a smile of pride, but he was making masonic and desperate signs to me with his fingers and at last faded away around a corner.

I was always famous for my desperate bravery and determined to stay, but concluded a man was a fool to be too brave and fly in the face of providence after I heard the storekeeper tell his man to run over to the barber shop and bring a policeman he saw there, as he had two notorious "rounders" who were trying to do him up.

Providence, I'm pretty nearly sure it was Providence, sent a runaway team down the street just then and naturally I made the usual rush to see outside, and kept up the natural rush around the corner, and under some 4000 clothes lines, and finally got back to the lumber pile, where my pardner sat with his back humped up and his arms clasped round his knees.

"Pardner," said he mournfully, "it's a tough lay out for men of genius and attainment. You should kill somebody and get hanged. You kill him and I'll swear I saw you did it and you'll go cock sure. I'll make sure of you going anyway, being as I think a lot of you."

I said, "No, old pard, the mighty spirit of the mighty race from which we sprung will not be conquered. We can kill a cow

and burn the hide if nothing better turns up.”

The next day luck was with us, and we struck a job mudding a hen house for a rancher, and since then have lived if not in opulence and refinement, at least frugally and on the ragged edge of a precarious existence.

As a confidence man. I came within an ace of being a magnificent success, but I didn't.

My Adventure with Bill Smith

— March 27, 1886 page 1 —

One day Bill Smith came down to my shack and said he wanted me to go on a scout with him.

“What for?” said I.

“Oh I struck it away up,” said he, “ran across one of them bloomin’ Englishmen all buttons and leggin’s, and he wants me to go up to the forks of Fish Creek to see if there were many hop poles there.”

“What’s he going to do with the hop poles?” said I.

“Now what in thunder would a man do with hop poles,” snarled Bill, “only to run hops up.”

“I thought he might want to sell them to boys for fish rods, or to make hen roosts of,” said I meekly, as I stirred the fire.

“Just what a chump would think,” said he, with withering irony. “Why look ahere, we have got sheep and cattle, and a railroad, and all we want now is a hop vineyard to complete the rural beauty of this country. Just think of it, Old Socks,” he continued, “just think of the lovely hops turning up the poles and their beautiful buds and blossoms and delicious fragrance; and better still, think of the girls who will be employed to pick the hops, for girls always do pick ‘em you know, and you me a holdin’ sacks for them. Oh yum yum! Who wouldn’t go and hunt poles up to Fish Creek.”

"But," said I, "it's going to be dangerous, ain't it, with the Indians running around loose, we have got to be mighty cautious Bill, or it's dogond few hop-sacks we'll hold."

"Just what I said to this bloke," said Bill, "and told him he'd have to put up purdy steep for it, as you and I were about the only two men who would dare go up there. So he's to give us 50 cents a day, which is mighty good pay these corky times."

I wasn't surprised at Bill picking me out when there were so many scouts around, for Bill knew I had always been noted for my ferocious courage, and that the Indians looked upon me as small pox in concentrated form.

Bill said he had two horses about as fine animals as had ever lived, and was well armed besides. He went out and brought in the gun he had left standing against the house. "Now THERE IS a gun," said he. "It's no great shakes to look at, but you bet, when she begins to sizzle old death ain't very far off," and he put it too his shoulder and looked lovingly along the barrel and gave a cluck, as though an Indian had bit the dust. I had no great pride in the gun myself. It was a Hudson's Bay make, with the stock full of brass nails. The barrel was tied on with string and flint was gone, but Bill said any kind of stone would do, or we could fire her off in an emergency with a burning stick. The barrel was bent in the middle so that while apparently pointing towards the Sarcee nation the muzzle was looking away down toward Milwaukee — and such a muzzle too! It was battered and bruised and shriveled, and reminded me of a boy's mouth when trying to whistle some soothing melody. But Bill said she was a daisy, and I believed him, although something inside of me whispered

I was a fool.

"A man might as well go to war with a section of gas pipe and couple of matches to touch her off with," said I, "as with that mournful relic. Looks as if the cursed old fuke came over with the Pilgrim Forefathers and had been used as a fire poker and crow bar ever since."

"Oh, does it, now?" said Bill cheerfully, as he polished the brass nails with the cuff of his coat. "Guess you ain't stuck on this gun much, but you bet she's old death on stilts. The barrel ain't too straight to blow about, but that's nothing. You see, there's a foot from the muzzle as straight as a string and you bet that's the end we have to depend on, — that's the end that shoots. It don't make any odds how we hold the back part. If we hold that front part straight, why, you bet, the grave will have an occupant."

"Mebby so," said I. "Now where's the horses?"

"Oh no hurry," said Bill, "I tied them down under the bank. We'll look at them in a minute," and I thought he appeared nervous and rattled. Presently we went down to look at the horses, and as we went along Bill said, in an hesitating way, "You mayn't think them horses are much to look at, but I tell you they are the most deceiving horses on this earth. The one you are to ride, why he flies, he just flies, barely ruffles the grass in high places. The one I ride ain't so fast, but I guess I can keep you in sight."

By this time we had reached the horses, and I walked mournfully around them. Bill gave one a sly nudge with his knee, and the other a sharp pinch in the flank, and as they started

nervously out of a deep and languid slumber, he stroked them soothingly and said, "Whoa, David! Steady Ananias!⁶ Whoa the little boys, easy now! easy the warrior chiefs," (and to me,) "Look out there! They're thin, but they're nervy as gun cotton, and liable to flatten you out, till they get to know you. Then they are as gentle as children catchin' potato bugs. Whoa! The noble spirits, the Whirl winds of the West," and under Bill's soothing caresses they dropped off into a deathlike oblivion. "What do you think of 'em," said Bill, as he cheerfully rubbed his hands. "Peelers, ain't they? Lots of fellows would say that they hadn't had a bite to eat for three score years and ten, but that's the way with these blood horses, — always look thin and sleepy, but wake 'em up, and they're gone like a beautiful dream. These fat, soggy horses, now, they ain't the kind for us — got no stay in 'em; but these scraggy bloods, like Ananias there, the one you're to ride, why they're all bone and muscle. See his bones and muscle now, and when they go, why they just appear to fill right up with wind, like a bladder and fairly sail. Yup, you bet."

"Yes," said I, in a doubting voice, "Ananias does look to have considerable bone, but I'm a son of a gun if both he and David don't look as if they were in the last hour and article of death. Where's the saddles?"

"Oh we don't want any saddles," said Bill in an offhand way, "It's only a ride of 30 minutes, and we'd go so slick and fast that I didn't think it worthwhile to bring saddles. Besides, I wanted to show this English cuss that we are tough to the backbone."

⁶ Ananias was a biblical character, who God struck dead for lying.

"Oh, that's all right," said I, "but a man's tough backbone ain't a goin' to help him out much on a bareback ride. I would as soon ride on the cutting bar of a mowing machine or the ragged edge of remorse, as on the back of Ananias."

"Some men would kick," said Bill, "if they got the whole of the Lord's Supper, but anyway," said he, in his cherry way, "we can have our blankets for saddles, and you can bet your harp of a thousand strings when we do start, the savages won't see us pass. They will simply see a cloud of dust and two grey streaks as we sail through space," and he began to whistle a cherry tune as we prepared to go.

Ananias was a tough looking specimen still my soul was heavy within me. He had but one ear still, one glass eye, and as he nodded his head in the deep abandon of sleep that comes to a horse that has lived to a hale old age, his under lip hung down and waved heavily to and fro, like a door mat hanging over a rail fence.

Bill said he had seen horses fatter, and so had I, and I fancy many others may have seen them also. I certainly think there are all of a half a dozen men living who have at times seen fatter horses than Ananias. But there are horses also that are poorer than Ananias. They are horses that have been dead for some years. Still he was in as good condition, or nearly so, as two boards nailed together and covered with hide. I was rather pleased with his appearance from the flanks back. He had been though a prairie fire and got singed to a beautiful golden brown, and his tail was bare save a tuft at the extreme end. Bill said it looked brave, — just like a lion and he said as long as that end's

all right you're all right, for that's the end you have got to depend on in case we got hard pushed and had to run. He said that would be the end between me and the Indians and if it gave out we would have to depend on the gun.

Well, we started. Before the house was steep hill. Bill suggested we had better lead our horses up, as the hill might be icy. I had an idea he was afraid they would fall and become a permanent part of the hill, but I didn't like to kick too much or he might think I was afraid to go, so we led them up and mounted. I thought Ananias shrunk up considerable as I got on him, but it may be fancy. Bill kept his eye on me and gave me directions. He told me to keep a tight rein, "for," said he, "Ananias is tricky and has a mouth like a railroad tunnel, and if he bolted and got away with the bit, I might not be able to get breath to pull him up till I got to Sun River." After a while he said, "When he works off some of his spirits we'll strike a steady lope till we get to the reserve. Then we'll just fly! By gum, ain't he a noble beast?"

I said I thought he was about the noblest beast I had seen in at least 15 years, but that I could see no shadow of evidence that he would bolt and run.

"All deception," said Bill. "He don't cast much shadow on the ground, but you know he's alive. You don't see no shadow of him running off, but I know if he turns loose he will go faster than Elijah the Prophet in his chariot of fire."

After eyeing him carefully, Bill said he thought we might venture a lope, so we struck out after much remonstrance from both David and Ananias, but Bill said all blood animals were dogged and mean tempered, especially if they hadn't any oats in

the morning. We went fairly well until we struck a buffalo wallow and in endeavoring to get over it on a lope, Ananias' hind quarters collapsed and remained a permanent fixture, while I and my saddle of blankets concluded to slide down and stay a while. Bill came back, and said, "Ain't he an obstinate cuss anyway" Just like a blood horse. Just our accursed luck if he'd sit right there till the day of judgment. I guess we'll have to lift him."

Part II

April 3, 1886, pg. 1

So I backed up against Ananias and bending down got his tail over my shoulder and letting my hand slip down to the tuft on the end, I took a reef on him. How I did lift — lift till my ears met at the back of my head and my mouth stretched back to encourage my ears to do more. Lift until the North Star and a few car loads of other choice stars were distinctly visible, and I could see four or five miles beyond the Mackenzie river. Lift, — until my nose disappeared, drawn out flat over my face, and Ananias' tail gave symptoms of severing connection with the 'Whirlwind of the West.' But Ananias, he remained. Bill stood by to encourage me, and also to do all the profane work, for I had neither time or wind to do it myself. Bill wanted me to keep on lifting. He said he would lift himself only he had lumbago in his back and anyway I had more experience in lifting horses by the tail, and besides there should always be a man to do the shouting and to watch if the tail was going to give.

"Dang the horse anyway," he said, "a man that didn't know

these bloods like we do would think that he was too blasted poor to get up when the fact is he can kick stars out of heaven if he wants to."

Finally Bill got a pole, and I backed up and hitched on, and after a repetition of the wondrous sights, in addition to a grand display of Aurora Borealis at noonday, Ananias was got on his feet and I mounted him with much caution while Bill held his head, patting him to keep him quite until I got on for he said these bloods were liable to fly like an arrow before a man got settled well in the saddle.

Finally we camped for the night. We put the gun where it would be handy and Bill said rather than depend on a stone for a flint, we would keep a fire all night so that on the first alarm I was to get the gun and he would touch her off when I gave the word, "And you bet," said he, "when she goes off you will hear old death chuckling in the bush."

The grey dawn was just breaking in the east, and I was just in the middle of a happy dream of how I had made arrangements to marry a hotel girl in town and start a sheep ranche, when I was rudely awakened by Bill, who, in a horse and agitated whisper, told me the Indians were upon us.

"Get old pulverized death ready, while I blow this fire," said he, "and you can just bet by your knock-kneed ancestors that we will scatter the mortal remains of that [___] to all points of compass. Now then, ready, point her, and I'll touch her off and let loose a litter of rattlesnakes."

"Where will I point her?" said I, "I see nothing."

"Naw, of course not," said he, "get the gum out of your eyes,

and look up at that bank and you will see his head. When I saw them first there were 88 or 90 of them, but they have all stood back, but this one and he's going to shoot just as like as not. Now turn her loose."

I raised the gun, but had no earthly idea how to hold it. But Bill came to the rescue.

"Point your end towards Edmonton and I'll engineer the end that goes with death," said he.

"Have you got your part dead on for Edmonton?" roared Bill, now thoroughly excited.

"As near as I can without a compass," said I. "It may be a little inclined to point more towards Victoria, but a man might as well try to shoot with a wagon wheel as with this blasted fuke!"

"Hang on to her," yelled Bill, and he rammed a burning twig into the open pan of Old Death.

St z z z z fi-z-z-z-z she went, and I hung on to her with worthy heroism waiting for the report, but no report.

"Is the blasting thing going to sizzle and fry all night?" roared Bill. "Why in blazes don't she go off? Oh, I know," he yelled, "I know, the measly charge is stuck up at the bend. Hang on to her and I'll help you. Keep your end dead on Edmonton," and he spit on his hands and jumped behind me and grasped my shoulder with a grip of death. "Funny I didn't think of that before," he puffed, while the fuke kept fizzing away cheerfully.

"I think the powder in the pan got damp," said I.

"Just what an enjit would think," said he, "any fool might see the charge got stuck at the head, but by gum just wait until the ball gets boiled down small enough to get past the curve, and

you will hear war in all its horrors!” and as he spoke, with a roar and ear splitting explosion, Old Death on Stilts went off! The ball had, according to Bill’s theory got boiled down and Bill and I were amongst the things that were left.

I recovered first and sat up. I was sitting on William’s abdomen and William was an evident wreck. Old Death had left our vicinity, leaving as an evidence that he had been with some fragments of a stock and a few brass nails. Then I shook Bill and he sat up and looked around him in a vacant, dreamy way.

“That was a most infernal noise,” said he, “what was it anyway.”

“Bill,” said I, with deep solemnity, as I held a bruised nose and bleeding cheek bone, “that was the sound of the Last Trump.”

“You don’t say so!” said he, looking curiously around. “Why then, by gum, we’re the only ones up yet, you and I. You bet,” said he, with a ghastly grin, “she will have to go off again before some of them fellows get up. There’s Jimmy Morris and Billy Sullen. I’ll bet they’ll have to bang her off nearly a week before they get up.” Then I told Bill what had happened.

“By gum, that’s so,” said he and up he jumped and looked eagerly at the Indian dead.

“Nailed him to the burning deck” he yelled, “didn’t even kick. Dead as a herrin’ by the red roarin’ June bug. You Bet, if he hadn’t been pulverized he would skipped for home. Whoop her up a Liza Jane!” and he danced around and rejoiced exceedingly. Then we sat down to watch and wait till morning.

Then I showed Bill the mortal remains of "Old Death." He looked sad.

"Well," said he, "she was a long time preparing to take her departure, but when she got ready she went in style."

"Yes," said I, "but considering we only had the ordinary charge for a 4-mile range she made a terrible racket." Bill said that was the fault of the bend in the gun. He said when the ball was boiled down to get past the gas it accumulated it produced an overgrown explosion.

It was clear enough now, and we started to view the dead body of the Indian. It was there sure enough. It had never moved an inch after Old Death exploded. — It was an ant hill on the edge of a steep bank, and both Bill and I walked around it, and sat down beside each other, and gazed wistfully at each other, and comforted ourselves.

We didn't eat any breakfast, but looked up our horses. We found them and found that during the night the spirit of Ananias had taken his everlasting flight and David had to be assisted to rise. Bill said it was astounding what a simple thing would kill a blood horse some-times. He said we must have overheated him the day before, or probably had just broken his heart because I would not let him run. He said a blood horse was very sensitive this way.

On our way to camp we came across the muzzle of Old Death. It didn't look like a boy's mouth any more. It had swirled and turned outward and twisted. It now looked like the mouth of an aged negro in the agony of death. We concluded to go home.

Bill said the Englishman could buy lightning rods if he wanted to plant hops.

As we started, Bill looked pensively at Ananias and said, "Good bye Old Whirlwind of the Far West, your hoof- beats will ruffle the grass no more," and he wept. I wept also, and had sore heels before I got home. Bill asked me to say nothing about our adventure and I never will.

MY EXPERIENCE WITH DOGS

— April 10, 1866 page 1 —

“The dog is the most constant and faithful friend of man.” Oh yes! Certainly! But the man who wrote the above must have been in dead hard luck. That man must have been sizing up his friends for a “Half” and didn’t get the “half” and came back to his shack feeling pretty corky and found his old dog contentedly sniffing for food in front of the doorstep, pausing long enough to lift his head for a look and give his tail a flip or two of welcome, before diving in hot pursuit after another bug and of course his master feeling all broke up on account of the ‘half’ felt a rush of emotion sweep over his soul on noticing his old dog was still friendly and exclaimed, “What a noble friend is the dog!”

But dogs don’t carry pocket books nor bottles in their coat tails, and ain’t in the habit of giving up much. In fact, I can’t recall an instance of a solitary dog in easy circumstances. A chronic poverty hangs around them like a garment and they seem to me to be hanging on with extreme difficulty to the slippery tail of life. I ought to know considerable about dogs, having lived the life of a dog for some time, say the last 15 or 20 years.

I formally loved dogs with a love that was surpassing. The petted poodle with glossy coat, either with a long fringy tail coiled gloriously over his back, or a short stumpy tail pointing

with stony rigidity into space, had my admiration; the Barracuda dog that swept like a destroying angel by night through barn yard and hen roost, scattering a whirlwind of blasphemy and blood and feathers, had my most active sympathy, and efforts to reclaim from sin and shame to rectitude and right, and the little old yellow dog with a skinned nose and scalded hind quarters, wounds received while sneaking grub from the kitchen, was a suffering object over which I could bend in infinite pity and compassion, while I smeared his ghastly battle scars gently and lovingly with hog's lard, and cursed the senseless brutality of my fellow men and servant girls.

But I am a changed man, changed for the worse. I no longer love the dog, "the noblest friend of man." The joys, the compassion the idolatry has assumed the shape of blasphemy and wormwood, and gall and also clubs. Such a revulsion of the lovely lifelong traits of my character must be due to serious cause, and it is.

I was sitting one day on an empty [__] keg, sweating and toiling over a wash tub, washing the melancholy fragment of a dollar and a half shirt, bought in the corky days of the past. I had already finished the pair of socks or what was left of them and they hung over the edge of the tub a mass of lonely fragment wrecked and desperate looking but still tragaunt and magnificent even in their ruins, when a notorious uproar took place.

My pard rushed to the door and said, "I'm a son of a gun exemplified if there ain't a lot of Indian dogs chasing cows."

With deadly precision I delivered a squirt of tobacco at the table leg and when I saw I had hit it square on the accustomed

knot, I rose up in my great dignity and went out to look at that pleasing sight of Indian dogs chasing cows, for I always loved to see the little dogs enjoy themselves. But the smile on my noble face never got time to expand much farther than from ear to ear. It died there and froze at once into a most lonesome grin, for the little dogs were tumbling the cows over a steep bank and with tails curled beautifully over their backs, were barking with unhallowed joy. My love for the dog at once died and forever, and my inmost soul turned loose and got its whole work in at once, in a fierce volley of startling and glorious truths.

One of the noble dogs was heavily handicapped in the race for calves, having the humiliation to be hauling a travois loaded with pillows and divers articles of housewifery skill, but he hoed it down with laudable zeal until they struck the timber, when the gallant but ill-starred cuss ran between two trees and his grimy old triangle refusing to pass, he remained a solemn example of the uncertainty of life. I saw the little grey dog's splendid career of crime cut short and brought to an untimely conclusion, and I laughed aloud in derision and smote my thigh and said, "There's a little dog that is standing right on the edge of the grave, that little dog will soon be in a better land and don't you forget it, in time or in eternity," and I rushed into the house and stuck a six shooter in my belt, and grasping a big 18 lb. Sharp's, rushed out, dug up the tomahawk and took the war trail at once.⁷

When I passed the little grey dog he was sitting contentedly listening to his accursed brethren chasing the cattle through the woods, and he looked at me in an apologetic way as if to plainly

⁷ An 18lb Sharp's was a long-range buffalo rifle.

say, "Pardner, if this here jumped up old triangle hadn't flew the track and destroyed my usefulness you can just go to betting I would be a whopping her up and fur would be a flying like chaff before the wind," and I said as I passed on, "You are there, you just keep on staying there until I set free your brethren from a world of sin and sorrow, then I will return and it won't make any difference to you whether the rabbits all die off this winter or not," and I passed on and went into action with a cheerful heart and a fervent prayer that success would be with me in the battle.

Now the cattle were milling like seven devils worse than the first, around Doc Henderson's field,⁸ and I climbed the fence and sat perched on it like a lonely fowl that has seen hard luck, and the battle opened with a magnificent display of volley firing. The dogs recognized the familiar roar of "Old Knock 'm Stiff," and knowing that I probably commanded this deadly arm, having been commander in chief of this same long winded fuke in other past engagements, where some of their dear little split eared friends had fallen victims to the dread pomp and circumstance of war, executed a brilliant movement and slipped in amongst the cows and continued the carnage.

I immediately ordered a charge, I think I did. I have only a vague idea of that order now, for in bringing my 18 pound Sharp's to the present to deliver a final volley before closing in with the enemy I lost my balance and Henderson's fence and I parted company with that sudden abruptness which often

⁸ Dr. Henderson was the first civilian doctor in Calgary. Eventually he moved to Powell River B.C. Around 1913 he established Canada's first full coverage Medicare system for local mill workers.

separates things closely connected in life. When I recovered from the shock occasioned by the piece of artillery falling on me and got rid of some very urgent language, I felt so brave and hostile that I wanted to fight as bad as any man can want to fight and yet recover.

If the Doctor had been there he would have been a Diest spirit without any unnecessary delay; if old death had been there the human family would feel happier now, for I would have beat him to fragments with the Sharp's, but I cooled down presently and in [] charge. It was as brilliant a piece of military work as I ever saw in my life. With a wild and soldierly yell and as much language as my failing energies would permit, I swooped down on the foe, revolver in hand, both sides of [] keeping pace with the rest of me, and never [] right in the thickest of the battle.

The cattle, recognizing in me a reinforcement that would stay with them if victory was six months coming, ceased retreating. I gave the order to fire a volley and advance, which I did in true mounted police style, and although I am a man used to scenes of carnage and blood I was greatly relieved to find that the enemy had, under cover of my heavy fire, retreated and were clean gone, went off to die, I have no doubt. I have been trying to locate their last resting place with my nose ever since, but the weather is not quite warm enough yet.

By this time my pard had arrived and in answer to his enquiries I told him the war had closed with honor to our arms and that we would now proceed to try the prisoner, the little grey dog. He was still there with his triangle and my pard said, "Why, blow

the head off the mangy cuss, what are you waiting for? Think that dogs going to prove his innocence?"

"Well," said I, "the brave are always merciful. Let us try him fairly."

The little dog sat up, and scratched his under jaw pleasantly with his hind leg and examined his triangle with an unfriendly eye, evidently inclined to lay all the burden of his ill-luck on it, along with the pillows and other truck and finally set to work to gnaw the tree.

I said, "Now just look at that, there's a brave little dog. That dog has sand. That's a dog that won't let no kind of bad luck come on him. He would keep gnawing away at that tree till the next sitting of the Northwest Council or get it down; besides I don't think we can consider this little dog guilty. You see, although he was an accessory before the fact, he took no part in the carnage. This dog has evidently been led astray by his notorious associates. He is a trustworthy dog, any man can see that by his triangle and load of household goods, besides it would be an ungenerous act to punish him with death, seeing he has played such dogond hard luck with his triangle and load, and now as I am commander-in-chief of the army that has just gained a victory and as I am, by virtue of my rank as commander-in-chief, both judge and jury and also firing party, I will pronounce this little grey dog not guilty, and will not put him to an ignominious death, but I will give him the most notorious licking he has ever experienced, before or after the flood, or since he opened his eyes on a sin cursed world, or gave his first yap on a filthy reserve, and I will confiscate his triangle for kindling wood."

So I fell upon that little grey dog with a pliable stick and fervency and determination, and with exhausted long suffering and much language, insomuch that the little dog lifted up his voice and wept sore. Then we cut him loose and confiscated the triangle, and the little dog doubtless has learned a salutary lesson which will go with him all through his life.

Next day I gazed sadly on the trees where that little dog had been and sighed vainly that he was not there, for two cows and two calves had died on account of the run over the bank, and the milk of human kindness toward Sarcee dogs dried up or soured. I think it soured and I have every reason to believe, if I am permitted to remain on earth, the dog in this section, as beasts of burden and means of locomotion will become a lost art.

Editor's note: In view of the essay to follow, it is possible that Kismet was using the little gray dog to symbolize Louis Riel; and the farcical battle, amid the panicked cattle, as an impressionistic parody of the Rebellion of 1885.

A Card

To the Electors of Calgary, and as far north as McPherson's Coulie

— May 22, 1886 page 1 —

Gentleman,

I have not been requested by a large and intelligent mob of fellow citizens to offer myself as candidate for the Northwest Council at the approaching election, but I'm on deck just the same. If I had any friends they would faithfully try to persuade me from taking this idiotic step, but their tearful persuasions would not even fix on my cast-iron soul, or turn my eagle gaze from the Mecca of my political hopes and ambitions. All of this goes to show the stern unwavering determination of my exalted character. I am quite well aware that the battles for political honor, all the pleasant and pathetic little reminiscences in the life of a high-minded candidate like myself, are dragged, ruthlessly and with sacrilegious hands, by his unscrupulous opponents, into the withering light of public opinion. I am fully aware that the garments, which hitherto have hid the atrocious acts and infamous conduct of my lawless career through life, will be rent asunder by unfriendly hands, and that my past life will stand forth, naked in all its hideous irregularity but unabashed, before the gaze of

the electors, and my fellow man generally. I shall have tacked on to me, like prize chrome, the legends "fool and idiot." One man will whisper to his neighbor, "this man steals calves," while another will say "he has felt lonesome in jail on several occasions," and two men drinking out of a bottle stealthily, in a box-stall, will say one to another, "this man would rob the pockets of a hired man killed on a railway." In fact I expect to come out of the contest without a vestige of a reputation left. But this don't trouble me, for I have the bulge on my adversaries there. If they take and stone and put to a cruel death the whole of my reputation, it won't tire them beyond recovery, for I never had much of a reputation anyway to pack around through life. But apart from my apathy as to the ultimate fate of my reputation, the germ of patriotism has been sprouting and growing within me for some time back to such a magnificent extent that in the face of all opposition, in spite of all contumely and contempt, I have determined, for weal or wo, to sacrifice myself as a burnt-offering upon the bleeding, dilapidated alter of my country.

As my opponents are old time friends, men whose feelings I would regret to hurt, I would be exceedingly glad if they would retire while they can do so honorably and while there is yet time, without awaiting the issue, and suffering the humiliation of defeat, for around these unhappy candidates, old and tried friends though they are, talented and incorruptible though they be, I have coiled the dead immortal clinch of cruel un pitying circumstances from which there is no escape. I may not poll a vote: I don't expect to. I would never have entered the exciting arena of political strife with the hope of being elected by the

cheerful vote of my fellow men. I would never have sat on the end of a rotten log and chewed tobacco peacefully, while my soul rolled around like a grindstone, and grew delirious at the thought of how soon a humble, unassuming tramp like me would enter the rostrum and sling my trumpet voice in fierce denunciation of the devouring hosts of pot-house politicians, (who, like the plagues of Egypt, have devastated and laid waste our borders) of taking a hand in amending the hog and studhorse law, and of sitting cheek by jow with Dewdney,⁹ and peradventure being asked to dine with him and get a few swigs of his wine (although I would rather have whiskey), without having to pay 50 cents for a permit.

Do I depend on the general desire on the part of my constituents to see me enter public life? No, gentlemen, I hold in my hands a power mightier even than the voice of the people. If I cannot control the inclinations of the electors, I can at least boast of the unfaltering interest of two men whose influence is mightier than them all. Under other circumstances I would probably not mention this matter, but it will intimidate my opponents and cause them to retire. I might as well say that these two, the Judge and the Colonel,¹⁰ in the event of my failing to carry a majority, are not only ready but even willing to send me to Regina without it costing me so much as a "spletter." With this

⁹Lieutenant-Governor of the NWT.

¹⁰ In all likelihood he is referring to one man: Justice James Macleod, who was also a Lieut. Col. with the NWMP. He served as second commissioner of the Mounted Police (1876-80), was appointed to the NWT Assembly (1876-81), and was a Stipendiary Magistrate from (1881-88).

omnipotent support to fall back upon, in case of emergency, I enter the contest cheerfully, with about as much gall as I have ever know a human being to possess.

MY PLATFORM

The other Candidates have not shown up their platforms yet, although I have no doubt they are busily at work upon them on the sly so that by rustling I expect to get my magnificent structure tacked together and run out in a conspicuous place, where every man, woman and child in the country can stand and look at it just as long as they please, without it costing them a solitary cent.

I was always a kindly hearted cuss, and always pleased to do anything to confer pleasure upon a respectable people, but a man that's going to Regina to assist in making laws and just as like as not sit beside Richardson,¹¹ and have private and serious talks, as becomes a member, with Dewdney, as to the best method of getting rid of the potatoes bugs on the reserves, can well afford to run out his little old platform and so confer pleasure on his admiring friends.

Here is the structure. If it is magnificent in its skeleton state, I leave the intelligent elector to fancy what its glory will be when robed with the paint of a wise and prudent ministration, and clap-boarded with the splendor of a deep, far reaching, all enduring legislation, such as my political acumen and master mind can

¹¹ A member of the North West Assembly

accomplish — just as easy as rolling off a log, and at a cost so trifling that, barefaced as I am, I am ashamed to mention it.

On account of the limited space accorded me in this paper, for which I have paid 75 cents on account, owing the other 50 cents until I get my first installment of salary as member, I can only give a brief sketch and a transient glimpse of the many hard glories and intricate machinery of this stupendous concern.

The basement of my platform I devote exclusively to the solution of the Indian problem, which appears to have baffled the skill and forethought of all connected, from Dewdney up to the Great High Priest at Ottawa, until it culminated in a war which did not reflect more than 7, certainly no more than 10, pounds of marital glory upon the British arms. This is because they are “chumps.”

When elected, my constituents will observe with pleasure and much joyful rubbing of the hands how this 10 pounds of glory well expand and flourish and turn itself around even as the sunflower turns, until all nations will lift up their voices in admiration and marvel at this wondrous transfiguration, wherein this war — which they looked upon as a cruel persecution of a despised and ill-fated race, conceived in fraud, sharpen in infamy and robbery, and ending in a mutual standoff between a well-armed host with Gatling guns, and a semi-starved tribe armed with clubs and breech-clouts only — will assume the form of a gallant, sanguinary conflict between a handful of gallant scouts and a painted host of howling, blood-thirsty savages, fighting against the kindly hearted children of the Great and Good Mother, and ending in any quantity of tin pot glory in

favor of "our brave boys," and the complete subjugation of the wily foe.

I cannot at this time, gentlemen, enter into full explanations as to this secret, but all enduring work will be accomplished, and this I can confidently assure you of, that before my second term of office, when I will be elected with glad and swelling hearts by acclimation, the Indian problem will be finally and satisfactorily solved, the office of Indian commissioner will be abolished, and all the Indian officials can commence snaring gophers for a living, and the doors of the basement of my little old platform thrown open and the place (having no further political use for it, it having fulfilled its mission) can be used as a store room for spring poems, rejected petitions and other light and amusing reading.

But it is on the top of my platform, under the piercing, un-sleeping eye of my country's and my constituent's eternal vigilance that your member will loom up in his colossal strength and where his unearthly legislations, with universal acclamation, will receive its unflinching all enduring crown. Here it is where I will sling myself with loose-jointed impartiality, every sect, grade and condition of men receiving attention according to the size of his pile. This is a confession my opponents would not as frankly admit, but truth, unswerving truth, has been my lode star all through life.

Gentle reader, since writing the above last night, I find this morning that circumstances over which I have no control forever bar my going to Regina as member, and consequently my unfinished platform will be sold cheap, for cash only, or exchanged

for a cart harness, enquire at this office.

As my credit is busted in town, and gophers have come out in better fix than I expected, I have decided to turn my string and attention to the gopher business for some time. Consequently I say farewell to the reader. If I have amused you to any extent I am glad. If you have done me the honor to call me a fool I feel amply repaid, for I have known that important fact for some years myself.

Red-nosed reader, with best wishes for your future success in life, coupled with the sincere hope that journeying down the western slope of life your bare feet may miss the horny cactus of sin.

I remain, faithfully yours, KISMET

IN PURSUIT OF SCIENCE

— May 29, 1886 page 1 —

I rise as one man, at this time, to explain why I feel so proud and uplifted. Probably since the time the old man Lot lost his wife 4 miles out on the plains of Sodom, no man has felt such a brass-band-like cheerfulness sweep over his barren soul, as I have since leaving town. This arises from a minute and successful scientific examination I made into the contents of a tin can I saw an Englishman cautiously and carefully hide under some straw behind a corral. With the limited time at my disposal I could not determine the exact nature of the fluid, and consequently packed the can along in a gunny sack for scientific research at my leisure. It is in such congenial pursuits as this that a thorough knowledge of chemistry is absolutely necessary to determine the nature of the substance in question.

Unfortunately some may say, for me, and for science, this is a branch of knowledge in which I never excelled and as a result I had to analyze the liquid in the primitive but very effective way of drinking some and after waiting a while noting down in a book the result. You will notice in almanacs and books of chemistry, pictures of bald headed old men, with long white beards and humps on their backs, intently watching a glass vessel the shape of a cow's stomach with an engine hose in one end. This

is the scientific way of analyzing, and although it may be a way that the righteous and God-fearing endorse it don't suit me. Neither will I endorse it. It makes a poor comparison with taking the can into some lonesome corner, sitting comfortably down with your back against a deserted anthill, and following the directions given above.

It is true that after examinations of this kind a man's system is jarred as with earthquakes, and the stomach, after you have no more liquid to retort in, will yearn with unspeakable pathos, to have the fountains of the great deep broken up all around and over it, and would be mighty glad to have a babbling brook inside; but any man whose heart is not after sordid riches, who have taken a deep and abiding interest in the advancement of science for the benefit of humanity, does not shrink from going unflinchingly into a corner or behind a board fence and plunging into the mysteries of chemistry with praise worthy zeal.

I am one of that kind, and always have been. It is a well-known fact that in all stages of the world's history men of genius, men of eminence, of expansive and advanced views and theories, have been reviled, scoffed at, persecuted and many have suffered martyrdom for a firm, unfaltering adherence to doctrines they preached, and as a humble follower in the footsteps of the great masters who died unrecorded, but whose works and researches are now high and honored in the archives of time and whose names are deemed worthy of a place on the scroll of fame, I also can bear humble testimony to the persecution men of science suffer even in this enlightened age, having been

before the Cadi¹² on several occasions and also languished in a dungeon overnight and been fined most nefariously in as much as to leave me at one fell swoop a deplorable financial wreck, on account of my thirst after knowledge.

Did this deter me, think you? Was Galileo deterred by persecution? Was Morse deterred by adverse fate? No, you bet they weren't, and neither was I. When bursted wide open by fine and persecution I simply borrowed a "V", when possible, and continued my scientific research with renewed vigor. Safe from the sharp nailed claw of persecution, secure from the long lean, bony fisted arm of the law in this [___] retreat; so secure from observation that I don't think anything but the eye of the omniscient can find me.

I feel it my duty give the result of my analysis to the world. To some readers, but only to a few, it may be necessary to say that men engaged in scientific investigations and using their abdomen as a retort in place of the stomach shaped glass used by the wealthy savant very often become unconscious during the experiment, or rather, just at the close, and return to consciousness having no remembrance of events for a week back, but possessed with the one all absorbing, ever present, all consuming idea that their head is a brass drum and that if they had only had a good big pair of wings they would fly somewhere where they would not have such a feeling of entire goneness, and where the ordinary run of headache would make a man think someone was thumping him behind his ears with a pickaxe. Thus you will notice that a man who devotes himself to the case of science

¹² A judge in Muslim communities.

must suffer, and also have a note book to note down results before the period of death-like oblivion and consequent goneness comes on.

Here is a faithful copy of the result of my analysis of the Englishman's syrup can of liquid, as found in my note book, found days after my head had shrunk back to its proper size.

There is a vagueness, a wonderful uncertainty in the entries, which increase in intensity and obscurity as they lengthen out. This is a matter of incalculable value to science, showing the extreme sensitiveness of the human stomach as an instrument over the glass "cow paunch" which a man could keep filling to all eternity without it giving any sign of the quality of the liquid.

Drink 1st — Thorax has feeling as if rasped by a piece of file; no change perceptible in lower region; dawning desire for another drink.

Drink 2nd — Thorax all right; stomach active; brain begins working.

Drink 3rd — Stomach settled; brain working up the future future; begin to think a man with 25 dollars' worth of sheep can be wealthy in two years; intend to buy sheep.

Drink 4th — Vision slightly obscured; can see best with one eye; tongue thickening; desire to sing. I sing "Empty in the cradle;" keep on singing; stomach wanting fresh supply; gets it.

Drink 5th — Sing pensive melodies; begin to forget about sheep; feel symptoms of sorrow coming on; remember a pard that fell off a boom 10 years ago and got drowned; sympathy in active operation; I weep plenty.

Drink 6th — Sorrow all gone; think of persecution, fine and

and imprisonment in pursuit of science; anger rises within me and hair begins to stand; feel warlike; want to fight; look around for a Mounted Policeman; don't find any; wish that old death with his rusty scythe would stab every one of them under the 5th rib; think of the man that fell off the boom again and grow sorrowful; weep frightfully; stomach wants more supply; gets it.

Drink 7th — See some of Strange's cows;¹³ — conclude wild cows can be chased on foot; make an advance; cows also advance, at a run; conclude to go back for something; receive a material lift through life from an aged cow; I sail through space; I light somewhere in [_]; don't know where; feel that there has been an earthquake, and wonder if anybody this side of High River escaped; look — part of pants torn out by concussion or earthquake, don't know which; feel very empty; fill up.

Drink 8th — Head begins to swell; tongue thicker but still limber and talking; stomach active with no fluctuations of upward tendency; mind changes from war to oratory; address a colony of gophers as fellow citizens; they sit up and listen very attentively, some dive down and bring up others to hear my eloquence; they appear to be filled with emotion; so do I; I tell them that gophers, though humble, are important factors in human life; I speak of the days when they had not to suffer from the attacks of small boys with strings and express a wish that they will stick together as one man and take an energetic part in the coming elections; I grow earnest but am annoyed at the frivolous

¹³ This would be a reference to General Thomas Strange, who served in The North-West Rebellion, and later established a large ranch east of Calgary.

conduct of an old gopher who has taken villainous advantage of the rest to steal a lot of grub from other holes and appears with cheeks [_] like apples; he makes a rush for his den, he is discovered and all is turmoil; they peruse him; I also pursue him but become tired; I load up.

Drink 9th — No change of importance.

Drink 10th — No Visible effect.

Drink 11th — Head swelling fast; line of vision 0; each eye crosses each other; sanguinary mood returns; see a man on horse-back in the distance; hail him; invite him to come over and experiment in chemistry; he passes on; I become angry; I desire his life and start after it; I revile him; the ragged part of my pants fluttering in the wind vexes Strange's cows; they charge; I also charge the same way; stomach in grand working order; brain active and inventive; heart terribly brave, in fact too brave; I stop and form a rallying square and wait for the collision; I receive it; where am I? Pants all gone but one leg and waist band: oblivion! I return to life; only for the one leg and waist band of pants would look like a Greek god; I can thump any Greek god in the territory! "Take a drink old boy;" "Whooper up a Liza Jane!" "Whoop la!" "I am a son of a gun on stilts!"

Drink 12 — Feel a return of deep sorrow; think of the man on the boom; weep bitterly; stomach begins to revolve slowly; head swelling rapidly; pail too small for a hat; tongue too thick to bend around small words; other organs and emotions dormant.

Drink 13th — Situation unchanged.

Drink 14th — All emotions and organs in a state of anarchy; hear a voice of a cowboy driving cattle; lie in ambush for him; voice does not advance; crawl over hill and take observations with best eye; find it's not a cowboy but a species of crane catching frogs; anathemize the crane; crane pays no attention but wades in up to his tail; stomach revolving like flywheel; I rise up; heavy sea raging; God pity all mariners afloat; am conscious of extraordinary phenomenon; poles of earth reversed; sun going east; mountains down toward Medicine Hat; am struck by a projectile, probably a peak of mountain in transit, and knocked gaily west; most of Strange's cattle standing on their head: most extrao —

I think I have recovered later on in the year. By the aid of my note book I find I have been experimenting in chemistry. This must have been some time ago. I find a bird has commenced to build a nest in the crown of my hat. There are two coyotes a piece away, who had concluded I was dead. I am not. I have been successful in my experiment. Organs in bad fix, head not reduced in size; wash tub proper size for skull cap; will order one. No more liquor for retort. Science is a magnificent thing.

This is what I find in my scientific diary and why I feel so pleased.

Analyst with their glass "cow paunch" would probably make out this liquid to contain 40 percent of alcohol, 10 percent of oil of ingredients, 3 percent of vox populi and the balance in baser metals, and a gullible public would accept it as Gospel Truth. But by my infallible way I make it 4 percent of pure alcohol, 20 percent of black strap tobacco, 2 hands full of blue vitriol, 68

percent of red pepper, 45 percent of slough water and some 781 percent of fight, emotion, vocal music, oratory and swelled head.

In future any Englishman can put his syrup can down openly and with impunity as far as I am concerned. Science is satisfied and I more than satisfied. Possibly the owner brought this mixture to test me with, but if he brought it to drink, I would, as a friend ask him to get a cast iron retort to fit inside him or set his house in order and ask "that his grave be kept green". I shall probably fall a victim, some time to science, but I'm brave, and am always ready to analyze liquids at any time for anyone except Englishman, and free of charge. Address this office.

Editor's Note: Kismet's description of the effects of the 'Englishman's syrup' has a certain resemblance to the mental states brought about by peyote.

I WORK ON A RAILROAD

— June 12, 1886 page 1 —

I was walking along a wood siding a few days ago, when a train came in and I saw the Superintendent walk around and inspect the wood pile. I was fairly billious at the time from the effect of the vagrancy Act, so I stepped up to him and said:

“You don’t want a No. 1 man to look after this wood pile I suppose?”

“Are you looking for work,” said he sharply, as he scanned my gorgeous costume.

“Well,” said I, “I have been looking for her for some time, but just as I appear to be about to locate it the thing seems to elude me, slips out of my grasp as it were. If I only could locate it in this wood pile it’s hard telling to what eminence I might rise.”

“All right,” said he, “you can keep these racks filled for engines. You will be paid by the cord as the engines take it, 15 cents a cord.”

“Do many engines wood here?” I asked.

“Not at present,” said he, “we have only two trains a week and occasionally they wood here. You can’t count on more than two cords per week and sometimes less, but it’s a permanent job.”

“Well,” said I, “the figures are nothing stupendous, nor the

prospects brilliant enough to stun a man; but, as you say it's a permanent thing, you can consider me engaged. There's the prospect of 30 cents per week anyway, and it can't get down to much less than half a cord on bad weeks, and besides, I can, during spare times, print in big letters on a board

WOOD PILED HERE

AT ALL HOURS OF THE DAY OR NIGHT
THE ONLY RELIABLE WOOD PILE THIS SIDE OF
OSHKOSH¹⁴

BEWARE IMITATIONS

and whenever a train come along, rush out and hold it up so they can see it, and by this means I may possibly work up a land office business, and I trust sir, by prompt attention to my onerous duties, and uniform courtesy and civility to the pile and the racks, and the passing tramps, to merit your approbations and esteem so as to be able to retain my highly responsible and lucrative position."

He was gone and I went to work, or made preparations by [___] sizing up the wood pile. I mentally calculated the value of my contract: 500 cords at 15 cents, 75 dollars. Well at two cords per week at the outside, 250 weeks, say five years the job will last, — may string out 7 or 8.

"By the bald headed," said I, as I jumped up, "the pay ain't Golconda like,¹⁵ but the permanency of the thing is immense and

¹⁴ A town in Wisconsin.

I'm in luck at last," and I softly piled my coat and commenced to fill a rack. It was sultry even to torridness and by the time I got a third cord piled my vertebrae was in convulsions, and my feet sloshed around in the airtight compartments of number 11 boots with a sound that gave me a touch of sadness, so I let up for a while and said, "Well there's 5 cents anyway. It has been honestly earned and the water which is churning like a bubbling brook between my toes is the sweat of honest toil, even though some might say it savereth not of the incense of Araby the blest,¹⁵ but more like a troublesome pestilence or a devouring scourge."

I worked on the wood pile for about two weeks and had 3 racks filled waiting for customers. 45 cents worth. But the engines flew by, and I began to think less of the immensity of the job and more of the financial part, and bethought me of the sign. So I made one. It was simple of construction, but chaste and beautiful in design and finish. I made a light frame about 10 feet long and 3 feet wide. On the top part I stretched the underside of a cotton bed tick and painted the letters in large characters. The result was beyond my most sanguine dreams. I would stand the machine up and get in between the bottom of the frame, the ends of which I could tuck snugly into the outside of the leg of each boot and walk off with ease and alacrity. At a distance I would look like a Salvation Banner on a jamboree, or an antichrist making an advent, but as I drew near, the beholder would see in startling Lithograph: —

¹⁵ A diamond mine in India.

¹⁶ A phrase from Milton's "Paradise Lost".

**WOOD PILED HERE AT ALL HOURS OF
THE DAY AND NIGHT!!!**

The only Reliable Wood Pile this side of the
Oshkosh or the Gut of Canso¹⁷

— BEWARE OF FAKE IMITATIONS —

Ask your druggist for St. Jacobs oil. The
Great German Remedy!!!???

Whenever a train would whistle at the mile board I would hook up in the machine and walk out to meet it. Of course I had some narrow escapes. Occasionally a wind would strike me sideways and run me off in spite of vigorous protest into the ditch and sometimes away out on the prairie. Sometimes it would get behind me and slide me through space with uncalled for energy. But I was full of sand and genius and rigged up a system of brakes, which, when I began to lose control of the machine would bring me up — zip! The brake consisted of a piece of rope and two pick heads and whenever I felt I was sailing too fast over bad track I would drop the pick heads and anchor.

I had been there over three weeks and my woodyard had achieved no worldwide reputation, when one day an engine came along and slowed up. I immediately hooked up in my caravansary and favored by a fair wind bore down on the train with much dignity. The engineer was hanging out of the cab window, as I approached, in a stately manner, like a stately 74,¹⁸ and he

¹⁷ A narrow strait separating Nova Scotia from Cape Breton Island.

¹⁸ A gun ship under sail.

said —

“Hello! Old scarecrow. Kind of advance agent for a wild beast menagerie ain’t you?”

I was in no benign humor and I said, “You had better pull up and empty those racks, or I have a nasty presentment that an engineer well pull out of this yard presently with only a fragment of an immortal spirit, or possibly the engine may carry only a section of mangled remains.”

“Guff!” said he “we used to pile things like you round our camps in Arizona to scare away Tarantulas with.”

“Sir,” said I, as I withdrew the ends of my banner out of my boot legs and planted them firmly in the sand behind me, “Sir,” said I, “you’re a liar.”

Then he climbed down off the engine and advanced at a charge, whereupon as soon as he came in range I smote him fiercely under the fifth rib and war in all it dread majesty brooded over the land. Broken fragments of disjointed language, redolent of the lake of fire and brimstone, floated in swarms over that section of unhappy country.

The engineer was a solid chunk of a man and fought with that sullen obstinacy which generally wins, and my prospects of glorious victory were about average, and uncertain as crops on Nose Creek, when I suddenly wheeled around and grasping my banner by the ends I brought it down with crushing fury upon his devoted head, sweeping him out of the sight of men, wiping him into pitiful oblivion as effectually as though he had never lived. I hastened to supplement his unhappy circumstance by loading down the corners of the bed tick with rocks and scrap iron. Then

I paused not upon the order of my going, and without

“raising a stone, or

carving a line, I left him alone in his glory.”¹⁹

He came along with his engine about an hour after, past where I sat, strongly entrenched behind an impregnable breast-work of cord-wood, and being convinced from my warlike attitude and suspicious calmness, that I was well booked with rocks and buffalo bones and other implements of war within the rifle pit, he wisely pulled on.

It is needless to say that by the next train I received a letter, from the Superintendent, enclosing a tie pass.²⁰ The letter said he had watched my conduct with unalloyed interest since being in his employ, and was fully convinced that a man of my brilliant propensities must become pre-eminent in any walk of life, expressed a hope that I would soon secure a position in a national institution of this country where hair is cut and board and lodging free and the strictest attention paid to guests.²¹ He said this was a position I was fully qualified to adorn and ended by requesting me to never mind the wood pile but take a good long walk.

I did, but before I walked I overturned the full wood racks, loosened some bolts at the switch, and placing my sign in the middle of the track, having remodeled it to read:

NOTICE

¹⁹ From the poem "The Burial of Sir John Moore after Corunna" by Charles Wolfe (1791–1823).

²⁰ A pass to walk alongside the railway

²¹ Prison

This wood being too bituminous and inflammable, producing more steam than our old rotten engines can stand. Take Notice! Tourist, Travellers, Ranchman and Squaws are invited to help themselves liberally, without money and without price. Anyone burning the remainder of the pile next week will be liberally rewarded by the Company.

Then I took a walk as the Superintendent advised, and I look forward, hopefully, even cheerfully, for tidings of the death of a rich old uncle who lives in Bengal

MY CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

— June 19, 1886 page 5 —

To the Editor of the Tribune

Sir, — I have come to the conclusion to marry. You bet that's what's the matter with Hannah.²² You have a good idea of the kind of damsel would suit my caliber, and consequently when I rake up enough to buy a few postage stamps you can steer on a few and Rome will howl.²³ You might suggest, gently, of course, that I am one of the greatest catches in the country, and a right handy man around any house. When the wedding comes on I propose to make it one of the most reprehensible affairs, that is to say, bang up affairs, complete in all its details, that has ever taken place in the border land of the west. I have been led to this conclusion from unforeseen circumstances.

I have been in the habit of sitting on a fence for several weeks past and gazing with open mouthed and unconcealed admiration at another man's wife. I thought it was all right. It wasn't. I perched myself one evening on the accustomed rail to drop my jaw and become lost in unalloyed bliss when her husband swooped down. He said, "You lantern jawed son of a gun, what the blue Jezebel do you mean by settin' up there looking at my

²² A biblical character.

²³ The Vatican.

wife for? hey?"

Oh, I wasn't astonished, no, I merely lost my grip on the rail and came mighty near falling off the fence, but I didn't. The woman laughed when she saw considerable of a section of pants hanging down behind me, and she hasn't grown much in my esteem since then. I was mad. I said to the man, "I suppose you think no man has got a wife but you. I suppose, by Jimminy, you think a fellow is going to steal this overgrown blossom of the wilderness and bracket her up against the wall to worship her. I'm an offspring of misery if I don't get a woman whose appearance will make you both feel puny and degraded and desolate and but mere worms on the earth." And I slid off the fence and spit on my hands and invited the whole measly crowd to wade in. They walked off and I heard the woman remark to her husband that she had no earthly doubt but that I was a first-class fool, or words to that effect. I have quit sitting on fences.

As regards the "tout assemblage"... that's the way I believe it's called, why you needn't go to any great bother providing she's a good solid chunk of a woman and don't [_ _ _], why I guess I can make it do, but I will not stand a woman that's waterlogged, as it were, with too many clothes. Not only is it very expensive but they waddle along like a vessel about to founder in mid ocean, with every soul on board. I like those stout built little beggars that have their duds drawn tight back and securely battened down, who don't have any superabundance of truck flying about, and that can sail right up in the teeth of a stiff breeze without a man thinking a couple of umbrellas had met in collision and busted. I'll take one of those kind if they are

plentiful, will take a couple and send you back the one I don't want. Spare no expense. In a matter of importance like this a man like me can squander eight or ten dollars with reckless cheerfulness. Insert the following advertisement which will have the desired effect.

WANTED

A man 48 years of age, sound as a [__], has 18 dollars in Smith & Lafferty's bank, and intends to engage extensively in the hen business shortly, wants to correspond with some first or second class woman with a view to matrimony. No objection to woman with decayed teeth or who squints, providing she don't wear striped socks. Any woman who wears steel corsets, the kind that's makes a man feel he's squeezing a section of sewer pipe or is infected with catarrh need not apply. Address, this office, stating whether married or single, weight, religious belief and capacity as to grub.

P.S. — Applicants must not fail to write distinctly how they are booked up and enclose a 3c stamp for reply, better put in two 3c stamps as some stamps have no gum on them. This is of the utmost importance and must not be neglected.

I trust by this means to soon be in possession of a gentle partner in life who, if not first class in every respect, will at least look like a woman at a distance and I sincerely trust my children, should it be my unhappy privilege to have any, will achieve distinction in more respects than has the wretched author of their being.

Now. — Should this meet the eye of the gentle reader, it don't make any difference which eye, will the owner of the eye kindly send a poor devil something to read? If the eye will go with the book and leave it with the editor of this paper, addressed to me, he will doubtless send to me which volumes as he cannot sell. Don't be selfish. A man may wear greasy cloths; he may have the appearance of an Ishmaelite; and he may have mighty few friends; but he is human after all, and has a heart to feel, to enjoy, and to suffer, just as keenly as those who wear purple and fine linen and fare sumptuously every day. It don't cost much for a kindly act or a friendly word, and little deeds like these sometimes casts a gleam of sunshine over pathways that are none too bright.

“WHAT FOOLS THESE MORTALS BE”

— July 24, 1886 page 1 —

Editor's comment: To put it mildly, this creative essay is an exercise in character assassination. Frank Oliver, the editor of the Edmonton Bulletin, and a recent representative to the Territorial Assembly at Regina, is the object of Kismet's scorn. Though he suggests in this piece that Oliver has slighted him in the Bulletin, I searched this newspaper for two months prior to July 24, 1886 and found no mention of Kismet. However, it is also possible animosity was begun years earlier, because Oliver may have rejected one or more of Kismet's submissions, while he was a telegraph operator at North Battleford. And/or Oliver had delivered a verbal 'slight' that traveled along the gossip telegraph, wherein derogatory comments were made about the material Kismet was publishing in the Tribune.

In any case, Frank Oliver may not have been particularly unhappy to hear that Kismet had passed away twelve months later. In 1888, Oliver returned to the Assembly. In 1896, he was elected to the House of Commons. From 1905 to 1911, he was the Minister of the Interior and succeeded in drafting a law forbidding Blacks to immigrate to Canada, removed a band of Natives from their traditional lands near Edmonton, and set in motion an exclusionary immigration policy favoring British and north-west European immigrants.

and north-west European immigrants.

In this creative essay, Kismet introduces a man who tells him of Oliver's comments. However, this individual is metaphorical-ly the Edmonton Bulletin itself, framed as a person, who complains bitterly to Kismet about his demeaning role as the newspaper Frank Oliver publishes

Some time ago I went into town and a man came to me and said, "Look a here, did you see what that chap at Edmonton said about you?"

"Naw," said I. "I didn't, but I suppose it was full of poetry and running over with the milk of human kindness."

"Yes," said he, "it was running over with truck of some kind. He says you are a liar and a fool and a [_]," scratching his head in a grieved kind of way, "dang'd if I hain't forgot the rest, but there was fully a pail full of other slush."

Said I, "It is well. I am a fool. We are all of us more or less fools and just as like as not I am a first class fool, but he's right about the liar part. I am a liar, and I believe in a man being first class in anything he undertakes, so I call myself first class in that respect. I rejoice to think that there are not more than three other men in this country I am much scared of in that line. But you must has seen that item in one of the printing offices, for no one down here gets his paper."

"Yes," said he, "in the Herald Office. And do'ye know when

I pulled it out from a pile it spoke as plainly as a critter in distress it did, by gosh, and just as plain as the nose on your face — Yes it's true, don't be surprised, but it's not my fault, I'm the same puny wizened up little cuss that I was when I was born. I was small then like a critter, as a man said, that had come months before his time, but everyone in Edmonton took to me kindly and said, "Maybe the poor little cuss will grow and I would have growed if he had gimme a chance, but he didn't, he fed me on sickly slush, so that when he'd send me to houses I'd get sick and vomit it all up, and people began to get tired of me always being that way and now I can only go to printing offices. After I was born I used to go to 13 houses that paid me, but now I can only go to four houses that pay for me, and when I go regularly every week they say, 'Here's this puny little cuss, dang'd if it ain't livin' yet,' and they laugh at me and call me 'our pill box wrapper,' and last week I happened to get into a cowboy's camp wrapped around a piece of bread for I wanted to see a cow camp and how they did laugh, one fellow said, 'Sufferin' Cynnell, what a gall a man has to call that a newspaper,' and another grinned and said, 'It's all right, it's just the size for—'oh I can't say it, it was shameful, but others have said just the same, and I wish I were dead I does.'

Here it appeared to stop snuffling and wiped its nose, as it were, on the cuff of its little coat and went on, "Confound him, if he must keep me stunted by feeding me such wretched truck he might at least give me one chance. If he'd only take me in one hand and set me out by a barrel head and let me get a month's rain, such as we get at Edmonton, you bet I'd swell, for you

know wet has a tendency to swell things, if I could only keep from getting torn to atoms by them cussed hail storms we have so regular there. Anyhow that's my only chance to grow. I know what's the matter with him same as everyone does. He thinks he's smart, thinks he should be something great as a politician and just because nobody else will think that way he revenges himself on me. Look at the way he figured round to get sent to Regina. Thought if he could only get there he would no longer be unknown to fame, but known and admired from Edmonton clean into the heart of the Libyan desert, and by a liberal use of tea and such he did get the half breeds to vote for him, for the whites, in those days, didn't give a cuss if a fool went there, and look what he did when he got there, why he got rid of the awful-est lot of slush and twaddle that he thought was political oratory, but nobody else thought it, and he was struck all of a heap that his name didn't go down to posterity, but it didn't, it went right back to Edmonton. But in one way I was glad he got to Regina and got rid of all that unsavory slush, because if he hadn't he would have fed it all to me and nothing could have saved me. But next election you notice Edmonton had enough of Frankincense's giant legislation. They thought they would send a man who wouldn't talk so much and do more, so Dr. Wilson went and you notice he didn't consume all the time of the house by airing a lot of unsavory twattle and call it legislations. The idea of a fellow like Oliver going as a member of the Commons to represent Alberta is so infernally absurd I could laugh, if I wasn't so weak and sad. I hear editors down here speak of him as a candidate in a joking way, but up to home his name is never

thought of except by one or two half-breeds he lets have tea on tick. No, you bet, after the election he will have lots of time to persecute me, and —”

“Gently my friend, gently,” said I, “you run on as though you didn’t like this man. You are rather uncharitable; Frankie is not such a bad fellow after all. He has his feelings, so have we all. He is ambitious, which is a laudable thing, if a man only has ability to help it on. His career at Regina, though not very brilliant, might have been worse, perhaps, and he evidently thought he was doing well. As to his being a candidate for the Commons, of course, that’s only a joke, no one has any idea of asking him to stand, and if they did Frank has too much sense to listen to such a proposition, knowing that the needs of the country are so urgent and important as to require a man of ability, knowledge and ripe experience to do them justice, which things he does not possess, though a wealthy man in many ways, and I think you will find that when Edmonton and Calgary or Macleod decides on a man who will be amply able to champion the cause of Alberta, he will be found among the rest of us, working in his behalf.

Perhaps the most pitiful and pathetic spectacle in life’s panorama is that of a man of average ability and attainments cursed with an inordinate ambition. He strives to reach a glittering height, which is to him as unattainable as the bright stars in heaven, and failing miserably is rewarded by the jarring laughter and contempt of those who know him, and by the unhappy entrance into his being of a feeling of enmity, petty animosity and un-charitableness against his fellow man. This unhappily is

Frank's condition, but in the course of time, say in 50 years hence, Edmonton may become a town, in which chase, although he will never be elected mayor, we see no valid reason why he should not be a member of the council or assessor, and be able to air his knowledge and at the same time conduct his newspaper, which you sneeringly call the 'pillbox wrapper'.

I don't blame him at all for calling me fairy names. He doubtless heard how the Mayor and ex-mayor waited on me and begged me to be Mayor of Calgary and how I refused in an airy and flippant way, and he has said, 'Look at that, there's a fellow having honor thrust upon him without an effort, while here I have been calling men fools, and liars, and political judases and murderers for years, and nobody believes me at all. He has learned how people fairly adore me on account of my brilliant writing, how I have been importuned by scores, nay hundreds of powerful magazine and papers to become one of their staff and have not even answered their letters, and he has said, "Oh, dad thump it, look at that, there is a fellow of no account, but he ranks now alongside William Shakespeare, while I have been wearing out my little soul with envy for six years and people laugh at me and call me a crank."

"So you see my friend, that Francisco has ample room and reason to kick, but you hear me, when the election is over you will find that he will give up the job of trying to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, which is equivalent to trying to make a genius and celebrity out of a man of very common clay.

Frankie's day is over. There are too many men of ability and experience untainted with groveling sycophantic traits of charac-

ter for a man like Oliver to ever be spoken of for the Commons, except as an ill-time jest. But I feel very sorry for him all the same, and should he die first, and it's only human nature and excusable in me to hope he will, though I trust it will not occur to throw a transient gloom over his —, well call it a printing office, for 38 years, I will write a beautiful 'In Memoriam poem' such as he knows I can write, something like this:

"He is gone and our bowels deplore him,
Poor dissatisfied Frank,
But we'll raise a monument o're him
A railway water tank."

"There will be 38 verses in it, and when trimmed and polished up, I fancy it will be poetic and very lovely inasmuch as the water tank will run through it here and there, like a thread of gold gleaming through some beautiful fabric, and my friend, don't mention the man or the — — well the newspaper to me anymore."

"I expect that when I am sitting astride the top rung of the ladder of fame, poor Frankincense will still be barking his shins in the hopeless effort to roost where only the great, the truly great, such as everyone, even the creditors I have owed for years, acknowledge me to be, are found; and if Francisco can find any new name of approbations' texture, which I have not already been called, why he's not such a common place cuss as people think him to be after all, that is, the limited few who have that delightful privilege."

And Mr. Editor, as this is positively the last appearance during the season of aroma and flies, be good enough to place my last quarters salary, \$2,070 in the hands of the president of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel at Edmonton.

Note: John Little's writings from the London Free Press, submitted sometime after 1876, might be of interest to historians looking at alternate voices in this period and particularly during events leading to the Rebellion. As a telegrapher, he was in a position to have access to official communications, which probably nictitated the use of a pen name. It is also possible he submitted material in the Battleford Herald, which was first published in 1878, and the first newspaper on the western prairies. However, there is a chance he used pen names other than Kismet, in both the London and Battleford newspapers.

